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Identical letters dated 29 May 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the thirty-ninth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/445).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the points made in its previous responses to reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions.

Regrettably, the authors of the report have kept in place a biased framework that ignores the real causes of the deterioration in living standards and the humanitarian situation that has been inflicted on the Syrian people. The Syrian Government can see no noticeable progress in the way in which the report was drafted. The authors have continued to neglect the reality of the Syrian people's suffering as a result of terrorism and the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on it by the United States of America, the European Union and other States. The report once again ignores certain regional and international actors' relentless effort to prolong the crisis and obstruct efforts towards a peaceful political resolution through a Syrian-led political process which the United Nations has repeatedly endorsed. As a result, the conflict has been prolonged, and United Nations representatives have insisted on describing the situation to global public opinion as a conflict among Syrian parties, rather than a proxy war waged by the Governments of Member States of the United Nations against the Syrian State through military interference, direct and blatant aggression, and the use of terrorism and foreign terrorist fighters.

The Syrian Government deplores the report's continuing attempt to ignore the key role played by the Syrian State and Syrian institutions. Despite enormous challenges, the latter have made great strides in providing subsistence and basic services to the Syrian people throughout the country, including regions where armed terrorist groups are operating.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic stresses that it alone is responsible for protecting Syrians and keeping them safe. It has a constitutional duty under national legislation and international law to fight the terrorism of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front and associated entities and terrorist operatives with numerous names and allegiances. Counter-terrorism efforts

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are crucial for restoring security and stability and improving the humanitarian situation and living conditions.

The Syrian Government reiterates that in the course of carrying out its counter-terrorism efforts, it has complied fully with the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law regarding the protection and security of civilians and the safety of civilian service facilities, such as hospitals and schools. The Syrian Government is committed to international humanitarian law, which it seeks to disseminate and enforce. It has therefore strengthened the role of the Syrian National Committee on International Humanitarian Law, which has organized numerous national activities and training sessions on the topic.

The Syrian Government is committed to the cessation of hostilities agreement that entered into force on 30 December 2016, and it condemns in the strongest possible terms the non-compliance of the armed terrorist groups and their backers. These groups have continued to violate the agreement, mounting attacks in numerous locations, firing shells, committing heinous crimes and carrying out suicide operations that have killed hundreds of Syrians and wounded hundreds more.

The Syrian Government rejects the erroneous political messages and claims which the authors of the report put forward in order to accuse the Syrian Government of besieging areas of Syria. In that connection, it wishes to make the following points:

1. In terms of its living conditions and the humanitarian situation, the Syrian people is being besieged and worn down by the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by the European Union and the United States of America. Those measures affect every aspect of Syrians' endeavours to meet their own needs and improve their resilience. In particular, they have targeted such areas as social care, energy, electricity, commerce, services, finance and financial transactions.

2. The areas which the United Nations describes as besieged are in fact besieged from within by armed terrorist groups that use civilians as human shields. The events that took place in the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo are perhaps the best case in point. The armed terrorist groups, which the authors describe as the opposition, prevented civilians from leaving those neighbourhoods in order to continue using them as human shields. The authors of the report have repeatedly and deliberately ignored that point.

3. The authors and Member States are no doubt aware that armed terrorist groups in the so-called besieged areas are in possession of various types of weapons and ammunition, and are regularly receiving fresh supplies. The terrorists have also denied access to large quantities of medicine, food and health supplies intended for local civilians in need.

4. By liberating large areas where terrorists proliferated, the Syrian Government has scored significant victories. Most importantly, it has brought back normal life in those areas and basic necessities, particularly by providing basic assistance and support, and by backing their projects in cooperation with Syrian and international partners.

The Syrian Government deplores the authors' attempt to use a United Nations report on humanitarian affairs in Syria in order to promote the policies of certain Western States. In a clear signal of that approach, the authors endorse in a wholehearted and partisan manner the American narrative regarding the supposed use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun. With regard to that incident, the Syrian Government wishes to make the following points:

1. The Syrian Government stresses that it has never used any type of chemical or toxic weapon in its war on terrorism. It denounces the terrorist

organizations for repeatedly using such weapons and prohibited substances, and the State sponsors of terrorism for attempting to cover up those crimes. The Syrian Government has called for an investigation into the incident and the claims made by certain States hostile to Syria, claims that were included in the report.

2. The Khan Shaykhun incident was fabricated by armed terrorist groups and their backers in order to incriminate the Syrian Government.

3. Some of the "open sources" that are regularly cited by United Nations reports have produced pictures and footage showing that the so-called White Helmets were involved in fabricating the incident. It is not surprising that the authors use those "sources" selectively to serve their purpose of demonizing the Syrian Government.

4. The Syrian Government has repeatedly sent the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons official letters providing detailed and accurate information regarding how the armed terrorist groups and their backers imported toxic chemical weapons from Turkish territory. It has also warned of the consequences of those actions.

The Syrian Government emphasizes that the Secretariat must take care in selecting the sources of its information in order to ensure due professionalism, objectivity and credibility. The Secretariat should therefore refrain from relying on information provided by the "open sources" for which the authors have a predilection. Their only mission is to tarnish the image of the Syrian Government and whitewash the armed terrorist groups and their backers.

The Syrian Government reiterates that it rejects the authors' use of non-legal terminology. For instance, it has referred to armed terrorist groups as "non-State armed opposition", despite understanding full well that the groups are connected with the terrorist groups ISIL and the Nusrah Front. Their conduct in this regard distorts reality and violates United Nations resolutions on combating terrorism.

The Syrian Government finds it deplorable that the authors have continued to promote the operations of the so-called international coalition while deliberately ignoring the reality that the coalition is not legal, that the Syrian Government never asked for it, and that the Security Council never authorized it. They also fail to mention the consequences of the coalition's acts of aggression, which have claimed the lives of innocent civilians; wreaked horrific damage on the infrastructure, including dams, bridges, hospitals and schools; reversed the development gains of the Syrian people; and destroyed economic resources that are needed for reconstruction, particularly oil and gas wells and the installations and equipment located there. Please find annexed a list of some of the killings, destruction and sabotage resulting from the operations of the so-called coalition in April 2017.

Regrettably, the Secretariat is attempting to legitimize the actions of the Turkish regime and its allied parties in Syria. Such actions are blatant attacks on the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and its territorial integrity. They flagrantly violate international law and the Charter of the United Nations, amount to direct support for terrorism, and have helped to prolong the crisis.

The Syrian Government finds it regrettable that the Secretariat has failed to condemn the Israeli attack on Government and supporting forces near Damascus Airport, preferring merely to mention the incident.

The Syrian Government rejects the references in paragraph 16 regarding Syrian militias, and stresses that Syrian Government forces cooperate with supporting groups that help them to combat terrorism in a legal and legitimate manner.

The Syrian Government condemns the fact that, in paragraph 32 of the report, the Secretariat defers to the Turkish regime by continuing to describe Turkey's closure of the Nusaybin border crossing as temporary, even though it has been in place since December 2015, and by accepting Turkey's claim that the closure is a result of security concerns. The Erdoğan regime's true objective in closing this crossing is to increase the suffering of Syrian civilians in Hasakah governorate at a time while thousands of mercenaries and foreign terrorist fighters are crossing into Syria. The Syrian Government notes in this regard that it informed the Resident Coordinator that it consented to the reopening of the Nusaybin crossing provided that humanitarian assistance was brought through the crossing in coordination with the Syrian Government as represented by the Governor of Hasakah, and provided that such assistance was distributed through the relief subcommittee in Hasakah. However, the Turkish Government still refuses to respond to United Nations requests to open the border crossing, and the United Nations has not taken any serious action, in deference to the feelings of the Turkish regime.

The United Nations must coordinate fully with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic with regard to humanitarian operations. It cannot indulge or give in to other parties such as those described by the authors as local authorities.

The report devotes a section to the Brussels conference. However, the Syrian Government is the primary concerned party with regard to humanitarian operations in the Syrian Arab Republic. Convening such conferences in the absence of the Syrian Government undermines their intended aims. The Syrian Government recalls that such conferences are largely convened for media purposes and for show; donor States have not followed up on the commitments that they made. Indeed, funding for the strategic response plan remains extremely low.

The Syrian Government regrets that the authors relay a number of claims and accusations that have been levelled against it with regard to procedural and logistical matters related to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to areas of instability. It has facilitated the delivery of such assistance in every possible way, so long as the assistance is intended for Syrian civilians in need and is arranged in accordance with the applicable Syrian laws and regulations.

Contrary to the claims contained in paragraph 30 of the report, the Syrian Government regularly approves the importation of medical supplies with inter-agency convoys, as well as requests submitted by United Nations organizations working in Syria.

In accordance with the periodic humanitarian convoy agreement for April and May, more than 15 humanitarian assistance convoys have been deployed to numerous areas. including Zabadani and Madaya; Duma (Shayfuniyah, Duma and Hawsh al-Dawahirah); Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham; the Wadi Barada area (Barhila, Kafr al-Awamid, Suq Wadi Barada, Dayr Muqrin, Dayr Qanun, Husayniyah and Kafr al-Zayt); Kanakir; Harbnafsah, Aqrab, Tallaf and Khirbat al-Jami'; Yarmouk camp; the Hulah area (Taldu and Kafr Laha); Dar al-Kabirah, Ghantu and Tayr Ma'lah; Afrin and Tall Rif'at; Qal'at al-Madiq; Kafr Zita; Damir; and Jayrud, Atanah and Nasiriyah. A number of other convoys are being arranged.

The Syrian Government finds it deplorable that representatives of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have been remiss in making arrangements to facilitate convoys. They have focused exclusively on areas that already receive monthly assistance, and have refused to enter areas requested by the Syrian Government. In order to denigrate the efforts of the Syrian Government, they have also provided inaccurate numbers for the convoys that are deployed each month and the number of places that have been accessed. For instance, OCHA and the authors have deliberately ignored the convoys deployed by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, in addition to the convoys that were deployed on the basis of approvals granted in the

previous month. Their reports fail to list the numbers connected with those convoys and their beneficiaries. The fact that OCHA has persisted with this approach is absolutely unacceptable and undermines whatever credibility OCHA may have left, if any.

The Syrian Government is concerned for Syrians in all areas, and has been working to alleviate their suffering and support them through the current crisis. It has therefore taken all of the necessary measures to ensure that students who live in areas where armed terrorist groups are present can leave those areas to sit their examinations. For that purpose, it has established special examination centres and ensured that the students have everything they need, including educational requirements, teachers, food and water. At the same time, it has continued working to evacuate the injured, the sick and the aged from those areas and provide them with free health care.

The Syrian Government stresses that the Secretariat must relay the truth of the tragedy that has befallen the people of Fu'ah and Kafraya. On 15 April 2017, they came under a savage terrorist attack when a car bomb exploded in the area of the rallying point of the convoys and emergency vehicles that had been transporting five thousand people from the Rashidin area of western Aleppo, which is under the control of armed terrorist groups backed ultimately by Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Over 120 children and women were killed, over 200 were injured, and dozens of other innocent civilians were injured. Numerous children were deprived of their loved ones, and large numbers of convoys and emergency vehicles were destroyed.

The Syrian Government once again calls on the Secretariat to provide information about the damage and the economic, social, humanitarian, and medical suffering borne by the Syrian people as a result of the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by the United States of America, the European Union and other States on the sectors that provide basic services to the Syrian people. The Syrian Government stresses that continued and deliberate disregard of this fundamental issue would constitute support for violations of the Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions on the part of those State Governments imposing the unilateral economic, financial and trade measures on Syria. Such unilateral coercive measures are illegitimate and should therefore be rescinded.

The Syrian Government recalls its previous concerns regarding false information included in the report, for example:

1. To date, the Syrian Government has granted approval for 26 international non-governmental organizations (and not 17, according to the report) to carry out humanitarian and relief work in Syria. Those organizations have the facilities they need for their work in accordance with the legislation and laws in force in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. In 2016, the Syrian Government granted more than 1,435 entry visas to United Nations staff. During the month of April, it approved 33 applications for entry visas to Syria and 64 applications for renewal of residence (not 29 as stated in the report). The Syrian Government also granted hundreds of entry visas to employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's continual promotion of cross-border assistance, and reiterates that such assistance is ineffective, given that most of it falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups deployed in the targeted areas. The notifications sent to the Syrian Government do not meet the minimum standard of credibility with regard to figures, data, number of beneficiaries and information on the parties that receive and distribute assistance to civilian beneficiaries.

The Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic cannot carry out its duty, as it has not been able to verify to date that this cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries. We remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are entry points for arms, materiel and ammunition being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Syrian Government strongly rejects the authors' continued bias in favour of Turkey and Jordan when discussing the delivery of cross-border assistance. The Syrian Government reiterates that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has in the past rejected that proposal.

As regards article 50 of the report, the involvement of the Secretariat should extend to calling on the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey to refrain from supporting terrorism in Syria, and calling on the European Union, the United States of America and other States to lift the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on Syria and curb the practices of the Governments that seek to undermine the foundations of a political solution, prolong the crisis and drain Syria. Only by so doing can the Secretariat guarantee that the suffering, displacement and migration of Syrians will come to an end. The use of the term "forced displacement" to describe the situation in the areas which the Syrian Government has liberated from armed groups is a deliberate misrepresentation intended to denigrate the Government's efforts and hamper local reconciliation initiatives, which have restored security and stability for the residents of numerous areas. The Syrian Government allows the inhabitants of those areas to choose either to put down their weapons, regularize their situation and stay in the area, or to leave for another area. This does not in any sense include civilians in the area, who return to their normal life once the armed men have left.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on dialogue among Syrians under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. It reminds the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people. The Syrian Government has played a constructive role in the success of the Astana and Geneva meetings.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Minister Plenipotentiary
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex to the identical letters dated 29 May 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Some of the attacks by the United States-led "international coalition" during the period covered by the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) for the month of April 2017 (S/2017/445)

- There was an attack on the Badiyah school in the Raqqah governorate countryside, killing more than 50 people, most of them women and children (see S/2017/240).
- A number of Syrian Government officials and Arab Red Crescent volunteers were attacked and killed while trying to reach the Tabaqah Dam to make repairs necessary to avert its collapse in the wake of a barbaric and unwarranted air attack by the "international coalition" (see S/2017/257 and S/2017/319).
- On 4 April 2017, "international coalition" aircraft bombed oil wells at the Umar field in Dayr al-Zawr governorate, resulting in significant material damage and causing fires to break out at the site.
- On 23 April 2017, "international coalition" aircraft attacked the Umar field again, bombing its main terminal and destroying export reservoirs T-317 and T-321, each of which had a capacity of 75,000 barrels. Coalition aircraft also bombed wells in the Umar and Tanak fields.
- On 26 May 2017, "international coalition" warplanes bombed the Syrian city of Mayadin in southeast Dayr al-Zawr governorate, killing 35 civilians, most of them women and children, and injuring dozens more.